

Firth Profile

Firth is located on the southern edge of Lancaster County, about 13 miles from Lincoln. Firth has gently sloping topography and sits on the Middle Branch of the Big Nemaha River, which runs along the southwest and creates some floodplain in that part of town, primarily in commercial and industrial areas. A major railroad line runs along the southwest of the town and a recent project created a grade separated access to Firth from the west along Firth Road. Primary access from the east is Firth Road and from the south is State Spur 34 B. This part of the County is served by Lancaster County Rural Water District 1 although groundwater around Firth is in better supply than many parts of the County.

Firth is a close knit community that is quiet and family oriented. A large centrally located park, adjacent to the commercial district, is a focal point of the community. There are also ball fields located on the south edge of town. The ball fields are well used by softball and baseball teams. The community center stays active with classes and private rentals as well as serving as the village offices and public meeting space. The public infrastructure is in good repair and has been well maintained over time. There are several commercial businesses including restaurants, banks, an assisted living facility, funeral home, photography studio, a new industrial facility producing electrical generators, and other businesses. These businesses are relatively stable. The proximity of Norris Schools (nearby elementary, intermediate, middle and high school buildings) with a Firth address can make it difficult for Firth to maintain an individual identity.

Firth is particularly proud to be agriculturally oriented in the middle of farm country. The local COOP does a lot of business in Lancaster and Gage counties as well as other adjacent Counties. Firth has a unique street pattern on the main street entering the commercial district with deep drainage ditches either side of the road and sidewalks set outside those ditches. Drives and sidewalks cross the ditches with culverts surrounded by stones, reminiscent of arched stone bridges. It give the entry and old European look. There is a lovely lake to east of town, on private property, that provides a picturesque entry from that direction, although large trees to somewhat obscure a good portion of that vista. Firth is also proud to have a very active organization of athletic teams and hosts and participates in many tournaments.

Community involvement in Firth is relatively high. The formerly active Firth Area Community Enrichment Team, FACET, has recently undergone an effort to increase membership and take responsibility for some of the regular community events. The Village Board of Trustees and the Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals generally stay at full membership.

Firth has undergone several recent efforts in community visioning and planning. The Firth Strategic Plan was finalized in 2013 was based on the Firth Community Improvement Priorities study completed in 2013. The Strategic Plan includes an evaluation of priorities according to their importance and performance. Three issues that scored high in importance and low in performance were Community branding, Welcome sign, and Communication (short term goal), Revitalization of Community Association and Village Festivals (short term goal) and Economic Development (mid-term goal). (The Community Association is in the process of revitalizing and incorporating as a 501(c)(3) organization.) These are three goals that the town workshop group should be able to discuss during the workshop. Firth has moved forward on the Park planning goal in their strategic Plan and now has a Park Plan, City Park Plan, Trails Plan and Ball Field Plan.

Firth has seen some commercial development in the past 5 years. A new industrial facility that manufactures electrical generation units was finished this past year. First State Bank has a new branch as well. Other

businesses turn over relatively seldom and are fairly stable. Residential development in the village limits has not been active, however, there has been some acreage development in Firth's extraterritorial jurisdiction.

Firth's primary challenges are providing for new residential in town, encouraging new businesses to locate there, and promoting their own identity while still capitalizing on the relationship to Norris Schools.

GOALS:

1. Enhance the visibility of Firth, Nebraska – communication among residents, branding, welcome signs. (short term)
2. Improve appearance and viability of the downtown business district – business district master plan, activities to compliment downtown revitalization efforts. (mid-term goal)
3. Promote economic development within the village of Firth – economic profile. (long term)